

# How The Media Elevated Anti-Immigrant Nativist Groups

Dina Radtke

December 28, 2016

**Southern Poverty Law Center Dubbed FAIR, CIS, And NumbersUSA “The Nativist Lobby” For Their White Supremacist Beliefs.** The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has extensively researched the three “restrictionist organizations,” revealing their insidious anti-immigrant agenda and ties to white nationalists. All three groups were founded by John Tanton, a white nationalist who believes that in order to maintain American culture, “a European-American majority” is required. [Southern Poverty Law Center, [1/31/09](#), accessed [12/8/16](#)]

**FAIR Was Founded By White Supremacists With The Mission Of “Severely Limit[ing] Immigration Into The United States.”** Of the three groups, FAIR is the most explicit in its nativist agenda, which includes repealing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, a law that put an end to a “racist quota system that limited immigration mostly to northern Europeans.” SPLC designated FAIR a hate group in 2007 and has defended the decision since, noting that FAIR “promotes hatred of immigrants, especially non-white ones,” adding, “By defending racism, encouraging xenophobia and nativism, and giving its all to efforts to keep America white, FAIR has more than earned its place in the pantheon of hate groups.” [Southern Poverty Law Center, [8/10/12](#); accessed [12/8/16](#)]

**CIS “Frequently Manipulates Data” And Uses Media To Spew Its Racist Message.** SPLC has outlined a number of studies that demonstrate how CIS manipulates data to subvert positive aspects of immigration. According to SPLC, the claims at the center of most CIS studies “are either false or virtually without any supporting evidence.” SPLC’s report of CIS also explained one of many instances in which the group used right-wing media -- in this case *National Review* -- to smear Latinos, suggesting in an op-ed that Washington Mutual’s hiring of Latinos led to the bank’s collapse. [Southern Poverty Law Center, [1/31/09](#), accessed [12/8/16](#)]

**NumbersUSA Is “The Country’s Largest Grassroots Restrictive Immigration Group” And Has Ties To White Supremacists.** Conservatives and progressives alike have denounced NumbersUSA for its racist roots, but its numbers have “ballooned” over the years due to its efforts to appear credible and unbiased. Nonetheless, conservatives have pushed back against the group’s influence on immigration policy. Alfonso Aguilar of Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles once explained that, “If these groups can be unmasked, then the bulk of the opposition to immigration reform on the conservative side will wither away.” [*Media Matters*, [2/21/13](#)]

---

## Trump’s Immigration Information Often Originates From Those Three Groups

**CIS Came Up With Trump’s False Assertion That Immigrants “Compete Directly Against Vulnerable American Workers”** In his immigration-focused [speech](#) in Phoenix, AZ, on

August 31, Trump claimed that, "Most illegal immigrants are lower-skilled workers with less education who compete directly against vulnerable American workers," adding that, "They're hurting a lot of our people that cannot get jobs." This is an enduring falsehood that was pushed in a December 2014 CIS **report** and **disseminated primarily** by right-wing media. Experts from the Immigration Policy Center and the Brookings Institution, however, have concluded that **immigration and unemployment are not directly correlated** and that immigrants "**generally do not compete for the same jobs**" as native-born Americans.

**A Flawed FAIR Report Inspired Trump's Claim: "Illegal Immigration Costs Our Country More Than \$113 Billion A Year."** In his Phoenix, AZ, speech, Trump also falsely claimed that undocumented immigrants cost the country more than \$113 billion a year, a figure that comes directly from a **flawed FAIR report**. PolitiFact **pointed out** that the FAIR report ignored undocumented immigrants' contributions in taxes, misleadingly based its estimates on an inflated number of 13 million undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S., and relied on "empirically baseless" and "anecdotal information" to reach its conclusion. As Migration Policy Institute's Michelle Mittelstadt **told** PolitiFact, "estimates that don't factor in positive economic impacts by undocumented immigrants don't tell the whole story." In 2010, undocumented immigrants "paid a net \$12 billion into the trust funds," **according** to the Social Security Administration.

**Trump's Falsehood That "62 Percent Of Households Headed By Illegal Immigrants" Use Welfare Programs Was Pushed By CIS.** Trump's official **website** claims that more than half of undocumented immigrant households "used some form of cash or non-cash welfare programs," a falsehood that -- despite being debunked -- was seized and propagated by **right-wing media**, including **InfoWars**, a fringe conspiracy theory site that has **close relations** with Trump. The misleading data comes from a CIS study based on skewed methodology. Fox News Latino, the Cato Institute, the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), PolitiFact, and CIS itself have found a number of **problems** with the study. NILC explained that CIS' welfare data represents the same "old CIS trick" designed to cast undocumented immigrants as cumbersome to the economy, and the study's problematic methodology is well-known: It inflated statistics by lumping American-born beneficiaries into the "immigrant household" categorization and conflated numerous anti-poverty programs with "welfare."

## **Mainstream Media Helped Legitimize The Nativist Lobby**

---

**Media Outlets Frequently Requested Commentary From Jessica Vaughan Of CIS And Failed To Properly Identify CIS' Nativist Ties.** Between November 27 and November 29, CIS director of policy studies Jessica Vaughan was cited at least five times by mainstream outlets *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Oregonian*, **The California Report**, and **Ohio public radio station WOSU**, all of which failed to provide sufficient context about her anti-immigrant agenda. But this tendency was not limited to those days in November. Publications with national reach requested commentary from Vaughan throughout 2016 (emphasis added):

From *USA Today*:

Expanding local enforcement would be a quick, cheap "force multiplier" for a Trump administration intent on increasing deportations, **said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors steps to curb illegal**

**immigration.** She said federal agents are already stretched thin, and adding local officers to do immigration work would help expand their reach.

"I would expect ICE to be inundated with applications" from local agencies interested in taking part, Vaughan said. "It's a great thing for public safety and our immigration enforcement. You're going to have fewer criminal aliens falling through the cracks and more sent home rather than being allowed to stay in those communities." [*USA Today*, 11/24/16]

From *The Washington Post*:

An estimated 690,000 undocumented immigrants have committed significant crimes that would make them security priorities — felonies or serious misdemeanors — according to a study by the Migration Policy Institute. That number is closer to 2 million according to some, **including Jessica Vaughan of the anti-immigration Center for Immigration Studies, whom the Trump campaign has consulted on the issue.** [*The Washington Post*, 9/1/16]

From *The Boston Globe*:

"The reality is that the American public expects the laws to be enforced," said **Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, which favors tighter controls on immigration.** "And he's exhausted his options. He doesn't qualify to stay. It's just that simple." [*The Boston Globe*, 1/15/16]

From International Business Times:

**Jessica Vaughan, the director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, D.C., which describes its mission as pro-immigration, low-immigrant,** said she thinks the Trump administration should declare Obama's executive action unconstitutional and work with Congress to find a solution. For example, Congress could come up with a narrowly defined amnesty policy that gave some DACA recipients green cards while adjusting immigration totals to accommodate them. [International Business Times, 12/8/16]

From *Politico*:

There are other actions besides the withholding of federal funds that the incoming Trump administration could take to reduce the number of sanctuary cities. **Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, a research group that favors more restrictive immigration laws,** said the most basic action the Trump administration could take is to clarify the expectations and obligations of local law enforcement officials. Vaughan said she believes the Obama administration's "ambiguity" on ICE detainer requests has left sheriffs confused about their legal liability if they comply with such requests. (In many cities, the ACLU has pursued litigation against county jails that hold undocumented immigrants without court orders to do so.) Vaughan said that Senator Jeff Sessions, Trump's pick for attorney general, could clarify to those sheriffs that detainer requests are not optional and assure them that they will not face prosecution for assisting ICE. [*Politico*, 12/12/16]

From Vox:

Or it could go with the definition that **Jessica Vaughan, of the Center for Immigration Studies (which advocates for lower immigration levels and stricter enforcement)**, uses for her list of “sanctuary cities”: “any jurisdiction that has a policy that in any way interferes with immigration enforcement, or shields criminal aliens from detection.” [Vox, [12/19/16](#)]

From the *Los Angeles Times*:

But **Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington, D.C., think tank that advocates for restrictions on immigration**, questioned the “dubious use of scarce taxpayer dollars.”

”Immigration proceedings are a civil matter, not criminal, and no Americans who are defending themselves in civil proceedings are entitled to taxpayer-funded representation,” Vaughan said. She also questioned whether taxpayer money will be used for immigration cases that involve criminals who should be deported. [*Los Angeles Times*, [12/20/16](#)]

**Media Ignored FAIR President Dan Stein’s Racist Past When Citing Him In Immigration Discussions.** FAIR President Dan Stein was repeatedly cited by mainstream media outlets, including by national outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Politico*, all of which failed to explain Stein’s racist views or ties to white supremacists. According to [SPLC](#), Stein once “served as editorial adviser for *The Social Contract*, a nativist hate journal,” and spews nationalist rhetoric about how immigrants perform “competitive breeding” to threaten the white majority.

**Univision, The Leading Spanish-Language News Source In The U.S., Repeatedly Provided A Platform For FAIR and CIS.** On at least three different occasions in 2016, Univision promoted the research of both FAIR and CIS. Univision’s evening news program *Noticiero Univision* aired commentary from FAIR spokesperson Jack Martin twice in November. On the November 17 [edition](#), the report labeled FAIR a “conservative organization that opposes undocumented immigrants,” but failed to provide sufficient context about the group’s agenda. On the November 30 [edition](#), the network provided no context at all. Additionally, Univision’s Daily Brief [email blast](#) cited CIS research, referring email subscribers to the group’s page without explaining its hidden agenda.